



The Buzz on Bug Bites



Insects either bite or sting. Mosquitoes, flies, mites, chiggers and ticks use their mouth to suck blood from their victims. Honey bees, bumble bees, yellow jackets, hornets and wasps use a stinger to inject venom. Spiders use a combination of biting their victims and injecting venom through their fangs. Here's a list of summer insects to watch out for.

Honey bees and other little stingers



Pay special attention to open soft drink containers and glasses. Swallowing an insect can be dangerous, as a sting inside the throat can swell your airway.

If an insect lands on you or your food, blow or gently brush the insect away. It is only investigating or foraging.

Avoid wearing bright colors, flowery prints, and black clothing, which attract stinging insects, as do the odors from soaps, perfumes, lotions and hair-care products.

If stung, brush the insect from your skin to prevent an additional sting. The honey bee leaves its stinger behind along with an attached venom sac that continues to pump toxins into its victim. Scrape the stinger away from the skin with a fingernail or credit card.

Non-allergic reactions usually last a few hours. Redness and swelling may develop around the sting site, and localized pain and itching are common.

Mosquitoes



These biting insects are attracted by body heat and carbon dioxide from our breath, as well as sweet odors and bright or flowery clothing. They live where water collects, such as bird baths, canoes and plant pots.

Ticks

Ticks feed on blood. They “hitchhike” onto their victims from grass or leaves, attach themselves and begin to feed. A tick’s bite is painless and can remain embedded for days without the victim knowing.

To prevent a tick bite, wear long-sleeved shirts, long pants, and a hat when in wooded or grassy areas. After returning home, inspect yourself carefully for ticks, or have someone else check you out.

If you find a tick, pull it off using tweezers. Grab the tick close to the skin, and without twisting, pull away with steady pressure. Or lift the tick slightly upward, and pull parallel

to the skin until the tick detaches. Common remedies, such as petroleum jelly, rubbing alcohol, and a hot match are not effective.

If a rash or flu-like symptoms (fever, headache, joint and muscle pain) develop within 3 to 10 days, you could be infected with Lyme disease. Seek medical attention immediately. Symptoms include one-sided paralysis, arthritis, meningitis, and nerve and heart damage.

Spiders



Unless you are allergic to spider venom, bites cause little harm. Black widow and brown recluse bites are exceptions. Black widows are found primarily in warm regions. Females, which are more aggressive, have a large, shiny black body and a red hourglass marking on the abdomen.

Within 15 minutes of being bitten by a black widow, a dull, numbing pain develops at the site. Faint red bite marks appear, followed by muscle stiffness, cramps, nausea, vomiting, sweating and dizziness. An antivenin is available and has to be administered soon after the bite occurs.

The brown recluse is most common in Midwestern states but has spread to the eastern United States. It is tan to dark brown with a dark, violin-shaped mark on its back. Its bite may go unnoticed for 6 to 8 hours before a red, swelled, and blistered wound appears, giving it a bulls-eye appearance. Fever, weakness, vomiting, joint pain and a rash may follow.

To avoid bites, wear work gloves when handling boxes, firewood, lumber and other items that have been stored for a long time. Shake stored clothing vigorously to dislodge any spiders, and inspect carefully before wearing.

Ouch!

For a bite or sting, follow these steps

- Wash the bite site with soap and water.
- Apply a cold pack for 15 to 20 minutes to reduce pain and swelling.
- To relieve pain use aspirin or acetaminophen.
- Use a topical steroid cream to further relieve itching and swelling.
- If the victim shows signs of an allergic reaction, infection, or has other unexplained symptoms, seek medical attention immediately.



